

**Belmont Human Rights Commission
Belmont Town Hall
February 5, 2009**

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Lisa Bernt, Judie Feins, Nan Donald, Fran Yuan

Members Absent: Janet Cudmore-Boswell, Rosalind Kabrhel, Connie Williams

Liaisons Present: Captain Peter Hoerr (Belmont Police Department), Kathryn Bonfiglio (Belmont against Racism)

Meeting began at 7:10 pm

1. Fran Yuan presided and took minutes.
 - A quorum was present. There was no report regarding the phone line. Fran agreed to check to see if Janet was still checking phone messages.
3. Revisions to the HRC Charge were reviewed. Members voted unanimously to make a change from:
“Receive and investigate allegations of discrimination against individuals....” to
“Receive allegations of violations of human rights laws and related legislation, and refer matters to relevant Town, State, and Federal authorities for disposition of matters within their respective jurisdictions.” This proposed change will be brought before the Board of Selectmen at the next BoS meeting on February 23rd.
4. The desired number of HRC members was discussed. At present, there are 7 members, although Lisa Bernt has not heard about her reappointment. It was thought that 11, the present number, was unwieldy, but designed to ensure diversity. HRC members agreed to propose 9 as a more realistic number of members to have to the Selectmen. We also discussed ways to find new members as there are currently 4 openings and 2 if the number of members is reduced to 9. Judie agreed to speak with the manager of Waverly Woods and put up a sign there seeking new members. Fran agreed to put a notice in the Belmont Citizen Herald and contact the high school for parents from diverse backgrounds that might be interested. Lisa agreed to send a notice to local religious institutions. We questioned whether a high school student could be a HRC member. Kathryn suggested that students might be too busy. Fran agreed to contact Alice Melnikoff, advisor to the Community Service program at the high school.
 - The December and January minutes were unanimously approved as amended.
2. Fran brought up the issue of committee positions. Lisa agreed to serve as co-chair with Fran. She would feel comfortable handling internal affairs, while Fran would be more of a liaison with town agencies and others outside of the commission.
7. Malcolm Medley, the director of Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination, will attend our meeting on March 5. MCAD is doing outreach and running town hall style meetings to improve its image and hear from communities. They have a backlog of cases. Lisa reports there are 3 new commissioners and a new general counsel. Judie questioned whether MCAD keeps data by towns. Lisa said they have a computerized data base and write

an annual report, but that the cases are categorized by types of cases and what happened, not necessarily geographically. This information is public and can be requested through the Freedom of Information Act. Lisa suggested there were practical issues that may make collecting meaningful geographical information difficult.

Fran agreed to confirm Malcolm Medley's attendance at the next HRC meeting. Once confirmed, Judie will invite members of the Housing Trust and Kathryn will invite the BAR board. Advertising his appearance at our next meeting in the newspaper and on listserves was discussed. Fran will reserve a larger room for the meeting.

- Judie reported that Anne Goldenberg and Preston and Connie Williams would be showing a film and speaking on a panel about the Fair Practices Committee in the 1960-70s during Diversity Week on Friday, February 27th at Belmont High School.
- Peter said that he received a call from the community relations person at the Department of Justice concerning the Wellington School playground incident in which graffiti epithets about Blacks, Muslims, and Arabs were found. He was mainly inquiring to see if the Department could be of any help. Peter reported that there was no suspect at the moment but that the investigation is on-going. He said that the incident has been classified as a hate crime, damage of property with the intent to intimidate.

10. Peter brought up the past calls from a resident of public housing who reported being called racial epithets by neighbors. There has been no further action on the incident. Fran reported that the person who reported the incident had written to the HRC, and she had followed up with a letter asking the person to call if desired. The person called Fran, reporting that no further incidents had occurred. Fran reassured her she could phone again if there were any further concerns. Fran also told her that she could report it to the police.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:55 pm.